Exercises from Origins and Development of the English Language Workbook

1. Changes in Meaning

The following paragraph is logically incoherent if we understand all of its words in their current meanings. If, however, we take each of the *italicized* words in a sense it had in earlier times, the paragraph contains no inconsistencies at all. Above each of the *italicized* words, write an earlier meaning that will remove the logical contradictions created by the current sense. The earlier meanings need not be contemporary with one another. They can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

He was a happy and *sad girl* who lived in a *town* forty miles from the closest neighbor. His unmarried sister, a *wife* who was a vegetarian member of the WCTU\*, ate *meat* and drank *liquor* three times a day. She was so fond of oatmeal bread made from the *corn* her brother grew that she *starved* from overeating. He fed nuts to the *deer* that lived in the branches of an *apple* tree which bore pears. A *silly* and wise *boor* everyone liked, he was a *lewd* man whom the general *censure* held to be a model of chastity.

\*WCTU = Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. They try to convince you not to drink alcohol.

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| Here are some words with an earlier, no longer contemporary meaning. Give the current meaning of the word and then explain what kind of semantic change the word underwent. | | | |
| 2. These words changed due to Generalization or Specialization. Pejoration or Amelioration. | | | |
| Type of Change | Word | Earlier Definition | Current Definition |
|  | aisle | passage between the pews of a church |  |
|  | bereaved | robbed |  |
|  | butler | male servant in charge of wine cellar |  |
|  | coast | side |  |
|  | discard | throw out a card |  |
|  | ghost | soul, spirit |  |
|  | ordeal | legal trial by a physical test |  |
|  | passenger | passer-by, traveler |  |
|  | spill | shed blood |  |
|  | thing | legal matter |  |
|  | wretch | exiled person |  |
|  | wade | go |  |

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| 3. These words changed due to Pejoration or Amelioration. | | | |
|  | crafty | skillful, clever |  |
|  | dizzy | foolish |  |
|  | err | wander |  |
|  | fair | beautiful, pleasant |  |
|  | fame | report, rumor |  |
|  | fond | foolish |  |
|  | glamour | spell, enchantment |  |
|  | grandiose | large, stately |  |
|  | impertinent | not pertinent, unrelated |  |
|  | inquisition | investigation |  |
|  | mischievous | disastrous |  |
|  | notorious | widely known |  |
|  | reek | smoke |  |

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| 4. These words changed based on Abstact or Concrete Meaning | | | |
|  | chair | a seat | professorship or leadership role |
|  | complexion | temperament, disposition | color and texture of skin on face |
|  | construction | action of constructing | something constructed |
|  | engine | native intelligence, ingenuity | mechanical apparatus |
|  | libel | derogatory pamphlet | a false and derogatory statement |
|  | nimble | quick witted, clever | quick acting, agile |
|  | sloth | laziness | slow-moving arboreal animal |
|  | to stomach | digest, to retain in the stomach | put up with, tolerate |
|  | zest | lemon peel | enjoyment, relish |

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| 5. These words changed based on Subjective or Objective Meaning | | | |
|  | angry | troublesome, causing sorrow | wrathful, raging |
|  | excitement | something that causes activity/feeling | the feeling of being active/aroused |
|  | joyous | experiencing joy, delighted | causing joy, delightful |

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| 6. Euphemism: All these words were originally neutral or favorable in meaning. Arrange the words from most unpleasant connotation to the most pleasant connotation based on your own judgement. Then find the dates for the earliest use of the word. What kind of conclusion can you draw? | | | | | | | |
| aroma, odor, perfume, scent (n.), smell (v.) (ex: You smell.), stench (n.), stink (v.) | | | | | | | |
| Word |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Date |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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| 7. Metaphor: Here are examples of words in which the meaning has been extended through metaphor. Choose the type of metaphoric change that has occurred from the following choices:  (1)metaphor, (2)synesthesia, (3)synecdoche, (4)metonymy | | | |
| Type | Word | Earlier Meaning | Extended Meaning |
|  | blue | a color | melancholy in sound |
|  | board | table | daily meals |
|  | bottle | a glass container | alcoholic drink |
|  | cloud | hill | condensed water vapor in the sky |
|  | cool | moderately cold | emotionally restrained |
|  | cork | bark of an oak tree | stopper |
|  | crane | a bird with a long neck and bill | a machine for lifting weights |
|  | fret | eat, gnaw | worry, be distressed |
|  | hand | thing at the end of your arm | employee, laborer |
|  | harsh | rough to the touch | discordant in sound |
|  | high | extending upward in space | shrill, sharply pitched |
|  | kite | bird of prey | toy flown in the air |
|  | lousy | infested with lice | contemptible, worthless |
|  | sour | acid in taste | off key |
|  | tin | a metal | a can sometimes made of tin |

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| 8. Sound Symbolism: This is when a sound seems to represent an action or characteristic. We can define it as the systematic pairing of sound and meaning. The sound that represents the idea or concept is called a ***phonestheme***.  Look at these words: swagger, swat, sway, sweep, swerve, swig, swill, swing, swipe, swirl, swish, swivel, swoop, and swoosh. What is the common sound combination, and what is the common meaning associated with these words?  Now go on and identify the sound-meaning pairing in the following groups of words | | |
| Phones-theme | Words | Meaning |
|  | tweak, twiddle, twine, twinkle, twirl, twist, twitch |  |
|  | glare, gleam, glitter, glint, glisten, glitter, gloss, glow |  |
|  | crack, cramp, cripple, crooked, crouch, crumple, crunch, crush |  |
|  | draggle, drain, dredge, dregs, drip, droop, drop, dross |  |
|  | bladder, blaze, blimp, blister, bloat, blow, blubber, blurt |  |
|  | track, trail, trample, travel, tread, trip, trot, trudge |  |
|  | crash, dash, flash, gush, rush, smash, swish, whoosh |  |
|  | bangle, dangle, jangle, jingle, jungle, spangle, tangle, tingle |  |
|  | bump, chump, dump, hump, lump, plump, rump, slump |  |
|  | amble, jumble, mumble, ramble, rumble, scramble, shamble, tremble |  |

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| 9. Ejaculations: These are the sounds that escape from your mouth when you are surprised or disgusted or some other emotion happens and you can’t hold your feelings inside quietly. These sounds can become words when a spelling pronunciation is created of the sound and it becomes conventionalized.  Can you produce the sound that each of these words originally represented? | |
| Laughter | yuk-yuk, yak, hardy-har |
| Attention getting noise | ahem, psst |
| Delaying noise | hem and haw |
| Expression of contempt or disgust | humph, piff/piffle, ptui, braak, chee/cheez |
| Cry of horror | augh |
| Expression of relief | whew |
| Signal for silence | shush, hush, ssst |
| Automatic noise | kerchoo, hush, ssst |
| Negation | uh-uh |

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| 10. Amalgamated Compounds: The following words are compounds, but at least one element of the compound is obscure and no longer commonly used. Identify the obscure element. | | | |
| word | obscure element | word | obscure element |
| backgammon |  | nickname |  |
| bonfire |  | walnut |  |
| cobweb |  | wedlock |  |
| good-by |  | werewolf |  |
| midwife |  | worship |  |